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Per Year, Fifty cents

Little Journeys
to the Homes of
American Authors

Irving

H. T. TUCKERMAN

SEPTEMBER, 1896

New York and London: G. P.
Putnam's Sons * *

New Rochelle, N. Y. The
Knickerbocker Press. *

50713-B²-1

Little Journeys

SERIES FOR 1896

Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors

The papers below specified, were, with the exception of that contributed by the editor, Mr. Hubbard, originally issued by the late G. P. Putnam, in 1853, in a series entitled *Homes of American Authors*. It is now nearly half a century since this series (which won for itself at the time a very noteworthy prestige) was brought before the public; and the present publishers feel that no apology is needed in presenting to a new generation of American readers papers of such distinctive biographical interest and literary value.

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The above papers, which will form the series of *Little Journeys* for the year 1896, will be issued monthly, beginning January, in the same general style as the series of 1895, at 50 cts. a year. Single copies, 5 cts., postage paid.

Entered at the Post Office, New Rochelle, N. Y.,
as second class matter

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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

27 & 29 WEST 23D STREET, NEW YORK
24 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, LONDON

THE KNICKERBOCKER PRESS, NEW ROCHELLE, N. Y.

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I swear to thee, worthy reader, if report belie not this warrior, I would give all the money in my pocket to have seen him accoutred cap-a-pie, in martial array—booted to the middle—sashed to the chin—collared to the ears—whiskered to the teeth—crowned with an overshadowing cocked hat, and girded with a leathern belt ten inches broad, from which trailed a falchion, of a length that I dare not mention.

A History of New York.

IRVING.

BY H. T. TUCKERMAN.*

THE similarity of the landscape in different portions of the country, is often mentioned as a defect in our scenery ; but it has the advantage of constantly affording an epitome of nature and an identity of suggestion favorable to national associations. Without the wild beauty of the Ohio or the luxuriant vegetation of the Mississippi, the Hudson thus preserves a certain verisimilitude in the form of its banks, the windings of its channel, and the hills and trees along its shores, essentially American. The re-

* Written in 1853 for Putnam's *Homes of American Authors*.

Irving

flective observer can easily find in these characteristic features, and in the details of the panorama that meets his eye, even during a rapid transit, tokens of all that is peculiar and endeared in the condition and history of his native land ; and it is therefore not less gratifying to his sense of the appropriate than his feeling for the beautiful, that the home of our favorite author should consecrate the scene.

To realize how the Hudson thus identifies itself with national associations, while scanning the details we must bear in mind the general relations of the noble river,—the great metropolis toward which it speeds ; the isle-gemmed bay and adjacent ocean ; and then, reverting to the chain of inland seas with which it is linked, and the junction of its grandest elevations with the vast range of the Alleghanies that intersect the boundless West, recall the intricate network of iron whereby the most distant village that nestles at their feet is connected with its picturesque shores. Thus regarded as a

Irving

vital part of a sublime whole, the Hudson fills the imagination with grandeur while it fascinates the eye with loveliness. A few miles from the shores, and in many instances on the highest ranges of hills, gleam isolated lakes, fringed with woods and dotted with small islands, whence azalea blossoms and feathery shrubs overhang the water, which is pellucid as crystal, in summer decked with lilies, in winter affording inexhaustible quarries of ice, and, at all seasons, the most romantic haunts for the lover of nature. Nor is this comprehensive aspect confined to the river's natural adjuncts. The immediate localities are equally significant.

On the Jersey shore, which meets the gaze at the very commencement of the upward voyage, are visible the grove where Hamilton fell—the most affecting incident in our political annals ; and the heights of Weehawken, celebrated by the muse of Halleck ; soon, on the opposite shore, we descry the evergreen foli-

Irving

age of Trinity Church Cemetery, beneath which lie the remains of that brave explorer of the forest and lover of the winged tribes of the land—Audubon; now rise the Palisades—nearer landmarks of the bold stand first taken by the colonists against British oppression, where Fort Washington was captured by the Hessians in 1776; and whence the enemy's vessels of war were so adroitly frightened away by Talbot's fire-ship, and the most persecuted martyrs of the Revolution were borne to the infamous prison-ship at Long Island. This wonderful range of columnar rock, varying in height from fifty to five hundred feet, and extending along the river to the distance of twenty miles, rises perpendicular from the water, and the channel often runs immediately at its base. The gray, indented sides of this natural rampart, its summit tufted with thickets and a few fishers' huts nestled at its foot, resemble the ancient walls of an impregnable fortress; here and there the traces of a wood-slide mark

Irving

its weather-stained face ; and in the stillness of a winter day, when the frozen water collected in its apertures expands in the sunshine, from the outer side of the river may be distinctly heard the clang of the falling trap-rock dissevered from the mass. Opposite are seen the variegated hills and dales of Westchester County. There let us pause, in the neighborhood of our author's residence, to view the familiar scene amid which he lives. Gaze from beneath any of the porticos that hospitably offer shelter on the hillsides and at the river's marge, breathe the pure air, and contemplate the fresh tints of a June morning. In this vicinity the river expands to the width of two or three miles, forming what is called Tappan Bay—which, seen from the surrounding eminences, appears like an immense lake ; picturesque undulations limit the view, meadows covered with luxuriant grain that waves gracefully in the breeze, emerald with turf, dark with copses, or alive with tasselled maize, al-

Irving

ternate with clumps of forest-trees or cheerful orchards. Over this scene of rural prosperity flit gorgeous clouds through a firmament of pale azure, and around it wind roads that seem to lure the spectator into the beautiful glens of the neighboring valleys. Nearer to his eye are patches of woodland, overhanging ravines where rock, foliage, and stream combine to form a romantic and sequestered retreat, invaded by no sound but that of rustling leaf, chirping bird, humming insect, or snapping chestnut-burr ; parallel with these delicious nooks that usually overhang the river, are fields in the highest state of cultivation surrounding elegant mansions ; but farther inland stretch pastures where the mullein grows undisturbed, stone walls and vagrant fences divide fallow acres, the sweet-briar clambering over their rugged surface, clumps of elder-bushes or a few willows clustered about the pond, and the red cones of the sumac, dead leaves, brown mushrooms, and downy thistles,

Irving

mark one of those neglected yet wildly rural spots which Crabbe loved to describe. Even here at the sunset hour we have but to turn towards the river, at some elevated point, and a scene of indescribable beauty is exhibited. The placid water is tinted with amber, hues of transcendent brightness glow along the western horizon, fleecy masses of vapor are illumined with exquisite shades of color; deep scintillations of rose or purple kindle the edges of the clouds; the zenith wears a crystalline tone; the vesper star twinkles with a bright though softened ray; and the peace of heaven seems to descend upon the transparent wave and the balmy air. And if we observe the immediate scene around one of the humble red-roofed homesteads or superior dwellings, which are scattered over the hillsides and valleys of this region, and call back the vision from its widest to the most narrow range, the eye is not less gratified, nor the heart less moved, by images of rustic comfort and beauty. Perhaps a

Irving

large tulip-tree, with its broad expanse of verdure and waving chalices, or a superb chestnut, plumed with feathery blossoms, lends its graceful shade, while we follow the darting swallow, watch the contented kine, or curiously note the humming-bird poised, like a fragment of the rainbow, over a woodbine wreathed about the porch, and mark the downy bee clinging to the mealy stamen of the hollyhock, or murmuring on the pink globe of the clover. The odor of the hay-field, the glancing of countless white sails far below, the flitting of shadows, and the refreshing breeze—all unite to form a picture of tranquil delight.

Resuming our course, after such an interlude, we pass the scene of the gallant and unfortunate Andre's capture and execution. Stony Point, where another fierce struggle for our liberties occurred, the site of the fortification being marked by a lighthouse, the towering Dunderberg mountain, and that lofty promontory called Anthony's Nose,

Irving

where a sudden turn of the river in a western direction all at once ushers us into the glorious Highlands. The house once occupied by the traitor Arnold is soon forgotten in the thought of Kosciusko, whose monument rises on the precipitous bank at West Point ; and here the wild umbrage that covers Cro'nest recalls Drake's fanciful poem ; and old Fort Putnam, crowning the highest of the majestic hills, seems waiting for the moonbeams to clothe its ruins with enchantment ; Buttermilk Fall glimmers on one side, while the proud summit of the Grand Sachem towers on the other.

Then opens the bay of Newburgh, a town memorable as the spot where the mutinous letters of the Revolution were dated, and where the headquarters and parting scene of Washington and his officers are consecrated to endeared remembrance. Beyond appear the most beautiful domains in the land, where broad ranges of meadow and groups of noble trees, in the highest state of order

Irving

and fertility, transport us in fancy to the rural life of England. The last great feature of this matchless panorama is the Kaatskill Mountains rising in their misty shrouds, or, in a clear atmosphere, stretching away in magnificent proportions, whence the eye may wander for sixty miles over a country mapped by prolific acres, with every shade of verdure—sublimated, as it were, by interminable ranges of mountain, and animated by the silvery windings of the Hudson, whose gleaming tide lends brilliancy to the more dense hues of tree, field, and umbrageous headland.

The navigable extent of the river, and the fresh tints of its water, banks, and sky, are in remarkable contrast with those celebrated transatlantic streams endeared to our imagination. To an American the first view of the Tiber and the Seine, their turbid waters and flat shores, occasions peculiar disappointment; and it is the associations of the Rhine and Lake Como, and those feat-

Irving

ures they derived from art, which chiefly gave them superiority. The mellow light of the past and the charm of an historical name, invest the ruined castles and famed localities of their shores with an enduring interest.

In the spirit of hearty enthusiasm, not less than local attachment, does Irving thank God he was born on the banks of the Hudson ; for it possesses all the elements requisite to inspire the fancy and attach the heart. The blue waving line of its distant hills in the twilight of the early dawn ; the splendid hues of its surrounding foliage in autumn ; the glassy expanse of its broad surface, and the ermine drapery of its majestic promontories in winter ; the scene of verdant luxury it presents in summer ; its sheltered nooks, pebbly coves and rocky bluffs ; the echoes of the lofty Highlands, and the balmy hush of evening, when the saffron-tinted water reflects each passing sail, and the cry of the whippoorwill or monotone of the katydid, are the only sounds of

Irving

life—all utter a mysterious appeal to the senses and imagination.

Washington Irving, although so obviously adapted by natural endowments for the career in which he has acquired such eminence, was educated, like many other men of letters, for the legal profession ; he, however, early abandoned the idea of practice at the bar for the more lucrative vocation of a merchant. His brothers were established in business in the city of New York, and invited him to take an interest in their house, with the understanding that his literary tastes should be gratified by abundant leisure. The unfortunate crisis in mercantile affairs that followed the peace of 1815, involved his family, and threw him upon his own resources for subsistence. To this apparent disaster is owing his subsequent devotion to literature. The strong bias of his own nature, however, had already indicated this destiny ; his inaptitude for affairs, his sensibility to the beautiful, his native humor, and the love

Irving

he early exhibited for wandering, observing, and indulging in day-dreams, would infallibly have led him to record his fancies and feelings. Indeed, he had already done so with effect, in a series of letters which appeared in a newspaper of which his brother was editor. His tendency to a free, meditative, and adventurous life, was confirmed by a visit to Europe in his early youth.

Born in the city of New York, on the 3d of April, 1783, he pursued his studies, his rambles, and his occasional pen-craft there, until 1804, when ill health made it expedient for him to go abroad. He sailed for Bordeaux, and thence roamed over the most beautiful portions of Southern Europe ; visited Switzerland and Holland, sojourned in Paris, and returned home in 1806. During his absence he seriously entertained the idea of becoming a painter ; but subsequently resumed his law studies, and was admitted to the bar. Soon after, however, the first number of *Salmagundi* ap-

Irving

peared, an era in our literary annals ; and in December, 1809, was published *Knickerbocker's History of New York*. He afterwards edited the *Analectic Magazine*. In the autumn of 1814 he joined the military staff of the Governor of New York, as aide-de-camp and secretary, with the title of Colonel. At the close of the war he embarked for Liverpool, with a view of making a second tour in Europe ; but the financial troubles intervening, and the remarkable success which had attended his literary enterprises, being an encouragement to pursue a vocation which necessity, not less than taste, now urged him to follow, he embarked in the career of authorship. ¶ The papers which were published under the title of *The Sketch-Book*, at once gained him the sympathy and admiration of his contemporaries. They originally appeared in New York, but attracted immediate attention in England, and were republished there in 1820. After residing there five years, Mr. Irving again visited

Irving

Paris, and returned to bring out *Bracebridge Hall* in London, in May, 1822. The next winter he passed in Dresden, and in the following spring put *Tales of a Traveller* to press. He soon after went to Madrid and wrote the *Life of Columbus*, which appeared in 1828. In the spring of that year he visited the South of Spain, and the result was the *Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada*, which was published in 1829. The same year he revisited that region, and collected the materials for his *Alhambra*. He was soon after appointed Secretary of Legation to the American Embassy in London, which office he held until the return of Mr. McLane in 1831.

While in England he received one of the fifty-guinea gold medals, provided by George IV., for eminence in historical composition, and the degree of LL.D. from the University of Oxford. His return to New York in 1832 was greeted by a festival, at which were gathered his surviving friends and all the

Irving

characterized by Lowell in the *Fable for Critics* :

What ! Irving ? Thrice welcome, warm heart
and fine brain,
You bring back the happiest spirit from Spain,
And the gravest sweet humor, that ever were
there
Since Cervantes met death in his gentle de-
spair ;
Nay, don't be embarrassed, nor look so be-
seeching,
I shan't run directly against my own preach-
ing,
And having just laughed at their Raphaels and
Dantes,
Go to setting you up beside matchless Cer-
vantes ;
But allow me to speak what I honestly feel,
To a true poet-heart add the fun of Dick Steele,
Throw in all of Addison, minus the chill,
With the whole of that partnership's stock and
good-will,
Mix well, and while stirring, hum o'er as a
spell,
The 'fine old English Gentleman,' simmer it
well,
Sweeten just to your own private liking, then
strain,
That only the finest and clearest remain.
Let it stand out of doors till a soul it receives
From the warm lazy sun loitering down
through green leaves,
And you 'll find a choice nature not wholly
deserving
A name either English or Yankee—just Ir-
ving.

Irving

The eminent success which has attended the late republication of Irving's works, teaches a lesson that we hope will not be lost on the cultivators of literature. It proves a truth which all men of enlightened taste intuitively feel, but which is constantly forgotten by perverse aspirants for literary fame; and that is—the permanent value of a direct, simple and natural style. It is not only the genial philosophy, the humane spirit, the humor and pathos of Irving, which endear his writings and secure for them an habitual interest, but it is the refreshment afforded by a recurrence to the unalloyed, unaffected, clear, and flowing style in which he invariably expresses himself.

The place which our author holds in national affection can never be superseded. His name is indissolubly associated with the dawn of our recognized literary culture. We have always regarded his popularity in England as one of the most charming traits of his reputa-

Irving

tion, and that, too, for the very reasons which narrow critics once assigned as derogatory to his national spirit. His treatment of English subjects ; the felicitous manner in which he revealed the life of our ancestral land to us, her prosperous offspring, mingled as it was with vivid pictures of our own scenery, touched a cord in the heart which responds to all that is generous in sympathy and noble in association. If we regard Irving with national pride and affection, it is partly on account of his cosmopolitan tone of mind—a quality, among others, in which he greatly resembles Goldsmith. It is, indeed, worthy of a true American writer that, with his own country and a particular region thereof as a nucleus of his sentiment, he can see and feel the characteristic and the beautiful, not only in old England, but in romantic Spain ; that the phlegmatic Dutchman and the mercurial southern European find an equal place in his comprehensive glance. To range from the local wit of *Salma-*

Irving

gundi to the grand and serious historical enterprise which achieved a classic *Life of Columbus*, and from the simple grief embalmed in the "Widow's Son" to the observant humor of "The Stout Gentleman," bespeaks not only an artist of exquisite and versatile skill, but a man of the most liberal heart and catholic taste.

Reputations, in their degree and kind, are as legitimate subjects of taste as less abstract things,—and in that of Washington Irving there is a completeness and unity seldom realized. It accords, in its unchallenged purity, with the harmonious character of the author and the serene attractions of his home. By temperament and cast of mind he was ordained to be a gentle minister at the altar of literature, an interpreter of the latent music of nature and the redeeming affections of humanity; and, with a consistency not less dictated by good sense than true feeling, he has distinctively adhered to the sphere he was especially gifted to

Irving

adorn. Since his advent as a writer, an intense style has come into vogue ; glowing rhetoric, bold verbal tactics, and a more powerful exercise of thought characterize many of the popular authors of the day. But in literature as in life, there are various provinces both of utility and taste ; and in this country and age a conservative tone, a reliance on the kindly emotions, and the refined perceptions, are qualities eminently desirable. Therefore as we look forth upon the calm and picturesque landscape that environs him, we are content that no fierce polemic, visionary philanthropist, or morbid sentimentalist has thus linked his name with the tranquil beauties of the scene ; but that it is the home of an author who, with graceful diction and an affectionate heart, celebrates the scenic charms of the outward world and the harmless eccentricities and natural sentiment of the race. The true bias of Irving's genius is artistic. The lights and shadows of English life, the legendary

Irving

romance of Spain, the novelties of a tour on the Prairies of the West, and of adventures in the Rocky Mountains, the poetic beauty of the Alhambra, the memories of Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey, the quaint and comfortable philosophy of the Dutch colonists, and the scenery of the Hudson, are themes upon which he expatiates with the grace and zest of a master. His affinity of style with the classic British essayists, served not only as an invaluable precedent in view of the crude mode of expression prevalent half a century ago among us, but also proved a bond in letters between our own country and England, by recalling the identity of language and domestic life, at a time when great asperity of feeling divided the two countries.

The circumstances of our daily life and the impulse of our national destiny, amply insure the circulation of progressive and practical ideas ; but there is little in either to sustain a wholesome attachment to the past, or inspire disinterested feel-

Irving

ings and imaginative recreation. Accordingly we rejoice that our literary pioneer is not only an artist of the beautiful, but one whose pencil is dipped in the mellow tints of legendary lore, who infuses the element of repose and the sportiveness of fancy into his creations, and thus yields genuine refreshment and a needed lesson to the fevered minds of his countrymen. Of all his immortal pictures, however, the most precious to his countrymen is that which contains the house of old Baltus Van Tassel, especially since it has been refitted and ornamented by Geoffrey Crayon ; and pleasant as it is to their imagination as Wolfert's Roost, it is far more dear to their hearts as Sunnyside.

And the legends which he has so gracefully woven around every striking point in the scene, readily assimilate with its character, whether they breathe grotesque humor, harmless superstition, or pensive sentiment. We smile habitually and with the same zest, at the idea of the

Irving

Trumpeter's rubicund proboscis, the valiant defence of Bearn Island, and the figure which the pedagogue cuts on the dorsal ridge of old Gunpowder; and, inhaling the magnetic atmosphere of Sleepy Hollow, we easily give credit to the apparition of the Headless Horseman, and have no desire to repudiate the frisking imps of the Duyvel's Dans Kamer. The buxom charms of Katrina Van Tassel, and the substantial comforts of her paternal farmhouse, are as tempting to us as they once were to the unfortunate Ichabod and the successful Brom Bones.

The mansion of this prosperous and valiant family, so often celebrated in his writings, is the residence of Washington Irving. It is approached by a sequestered road, which enhances the effect of its natural beauty. A more tranquil and protected abode, nestled in the lap of nature, never captivated a poet's eye. Rising from the bank of the river, which a strip of woodland alone intercepts, it

Irving

unites every rural charm to the most complete seclusion. From this interesting domain is visible the broad surface of the Tappan Zee ; the grounds slope to the water's edge, and are bordered by wooded ravines ; a clear brook ripples near, and several neat paths lead to shadowy walks or fine points of river scenery. The house itself is a graceful combination of the English cottage and the Dutch farmhouse. The crow-stepped gables, the tiles in the hall, and the weathercocks, partake of the latter character ; while the white walls gleaming through the trees, the smooth and verdant turf, and the mantling vines of ivy and clambering roses, suggest the former. Indeed, in this delightful homestead are tokens of all that is most characteristic of its owner. The simplicity and rustic grace of the abode indicate an unperverted taste,—its secluded position a love of veiled pictures of English country-life ; the weathercock that used to veer about on the Stadthouse of Amsterdam, is a

Irving

symbol of the fatherland ; while the one that adorned the grand dwellings in Albany before the Revolution, is a significant memorial of the old Dutch colonists ; and they are thus both associated with the fragrant memory of that famous and unique historian, Diedrich Knickerbocker. The quaint and the beautiful are thus blended, and the effect of the whole is singularly harmonious. From the quietude of this retreat are obtainable the most extensive prospects ; and while its sheltered position breathes the very air of domestic repose, the scenery it commands is eloquent of broad and generous sympathies.

Not less rare than beautiful is the lot of the author to whom it is permitted to gather up the memorials of his fame and witness their permanent recognition,—the first partial favor of his contemporaries renewed by the mature appreciation of another generation ; and equally gratifying is the coincidence of such a noble satisfaction with a return to the cher-

Irving

ished and picturesque haunts of childhood and youth. It is a phase of life scarcely less delightful to contemplate than to enjoy; and we agree with a native artist who declares that in his many trips up and down the Hudson, he never passed Sunnyside without a thrill of pleasure. Nor, if thus interesting even as an object in the landscape, is it difficult to imagine what moral attractions it possesses to the kindred and friends who there habitually enjoy such genial companionship and frank hospitality. To this favored spot, around which his fondest reminiscences hovered during a long absence, Mr. Irving returned a few years since, crowned with the purest literary renown, and as much attached to his native scenery as when he wandered there in the holiday reveries of boyhood. And here, in the midst of a landscape his pen has made attractive in both hemispheres, and of friends whose love surpasses the highest need of fame, he lives in daily view of scenes thrice endeared—

Irving

by taste, association, and habit—the old locust that blossoms on the green bank in spring, the brook that sparkles along the grass, the peaked turret and vine-covered wall of that modest yet traditional dwelling, the favorite valley watered by the romantic Pocantico, and, above all, the glorious river of his heart.

We are strongly tempted to record some of the charming anecdotes which fall from his lips in the hour of genial companionship; to revert to the details of his personal career; the remarkable coincidences by which he became a spectator of some of the most noted occurrences of the last half-century;—his personal intercourse with the gifted and renowned of both hemispheres; the fond admiration manifested by his countrymen in making his name familiar as a household word, on their ships and steamers, their schools, hotels, and townships; the beautiful features of his domestic life; the affectionate reverence with which he is regarded by his relatives and his immedi-

Irving

ate friends and neighbors ; the refined yet joyous tone of his truly "Sunnyside" hospitalities, so charmingly enlivened by his humorous and historical reminiscences. But two considerations warn us from these seductive topics—the one a cherished hope that the reminiscences thus briefly alluded to may yet be gathered up in his own hand ; the other our knowledge of his delicacy of feeling and sensitive habit in regard to personalities. In a letter to the editor of the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, Mr. Irving, under the character of Geoffrey Crayon, gives an account of his purchase of the Van Tassel estate, now called "Sunnyside," and a characteristic description of the neighborhood, which abounds in some of the happiest touches of his style. This letter was a commencement of a series of articles published in the *Knickerbocker*, which, excepting his *Life of Goldsmith*, are the last of his published writings.

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